

[Mrs. Jack Miles]

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Folk Stuff Range Lore

Range-lore

Doyle

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RANGE-LORE

"Few women in the entire history of the cow country ever threw their sugins (bedding) in the wagon and rode the range with their husband like a man as I did," says Mrs. Jack Miles of San Angelo, Texas. "My love for horses has always amounted to a passion and I have owned some of the finest ones in the country. C.12 - 2/11/41 Texas

"We had few diversions in the early days and when my favorite uncle, a ranchman of the Concho Country came to visit us at Uvalde, Texas we were thrilled to death. On one of these visits he brought me a picture of his buddy, who had become famous for his expert riding and 2 roping all over the wild and wooly west. One glance at the handsome pictured face of this dashing Young Lockinvar changed my heart toward all my cowboy suitors and set me wondering if I had fallen in love with a picture.

"My family decided to move to Tom Green County. We settled on the North Concho River and I was at last in my own element. I could stay in my saddle from morning until night, eat out of the chuck wagon and attend all the square dances for miles around. I hunted and fished and ran races with the dashing vaqueros and at last the day of days came. I shall never forget the day I met the Young Lockinvar of my picture. He was in his proper setting, at the head of a big drove of horses. Jack was of one of the oldest families in the state.

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Their land holdings consisted of fifty sections which stretched across Tom Green and Runnels Counties and another ranch of fifty-nine sections in the Fort McKavett Country. The town of Miles and also Rowena, as well as Harriett were all named for members of the Miles family. They were in this country when San Angelo was a mere village of picket houses and adobe huts, when gambling tables stood on the side walks and the first theatre company performed in a livery stable.

“Jack and I attended many frontier socials, picnics, fish fries, races and glorious old time square dances, where the fiddle, banjo, and guitar made “Sally Gooden”, Turkey in the Straw” and “Pop Goes the Weasel”, famous. Thirty or forty miles was not considered a long distance to go on 3 horse back to a dance. After a night of hilarious break downs we were served black coffee and cake to stimulate our fagging muscles, for the old time dance was a test of endurance as well an skill.

“I rode like an Indian and at the age of 16 did not lack for suitors. I led them all a wild race from one end of the Concho Country to the other.

“The most treasured gift that love could buy for me was a horse, so one of my suitors presented me with a fine steed, which I called Ball Stockings. My young heart swayed mightily toward the donor. Then another suitor presented me with a still finer steed to add to my mount, and asked me to return Ball Stockings to his former owner, which I refused to do. One night as a bunch of us were riding out to a dance at the Doak Ranch and I was proudly mounted upon Ball Stockings, riding beside my latest suitor when crack! went a whip across my horse's hips. The jealous donor of Ball Stockings had only meant to interrupt our conversation but he succeeded beyond his intentions, for my adorable Ball Stockings broke into a startled and furious run and I had a race as wildly exciting as my heart could crave, while my anxious comrades flew after me. This settled my interest in the jealous suitor.

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"Jack's lariat had already [?] my heart, anyway, so we were soon engaged and we married at the old Bailey home on the T. & F. Ranch. A big dinner followed the ceremony and the festivities ended in a big square dance that 4 night. Each friend took a piece of my wedding veil as a souvenir and my husband and I came to San Angelo next day in grand style, riding in a big barouche behind a negro driver. Again the wide open spaces claimed me, I lived in the saddle from then on. My honeymoon was spent on horse back and Jack liked nothing better than to have me at every round-up and often said he wondered how he had ever made the long drives without me. Of course I knew he said these things only to please me but I liked it just the same. One of his first presents to me was a fine thorough bred dun horse. He was imported from England by Lord Durand and was the darling of my heart. He could pace his mile in three minutes. I called him Baby Dun and the magnificent creature became the apple of my eye. I spent months in gently training him, the result of which would have given him entry into a circus. Jack taught him to kneel for me to mount him, bow to the judge, tell his age by pawing with his left foot and we would have to teach him to paw one more time each year. When I would go out to bridle him he would stand on his hind feet, shake his head at me, then come meekly up and take the bits in his mouth. His tricks always delighted his many admirers. Jack gave two choice lots in the business section of San Angelo for Baby Dun.

"For years the greatest event of our Concho Country was our fair. It was a gala week of riding, roping, branding, contests, racing and cowboy tournaments of every description. In the many races I won at the fair, I rode a side saddle with 5 big black hair saddle pockets. These were always filled with candy, won in racing with the cowboys. For my racing I used a little brown pony called Pumpkin.

"My saddle, bridle, blanket, spurs, quirt, and rope cost \$100.00. My bridle bit was silver mounted. My riding habit was made of water proof flannel trimmed in big brass buttons. My hat was a John B. Stetson. I wore buckskin gauntlet gloves. My boots were calf skin and laced to the knees. I still have a pair of them. I was a good shot but never wore a pistol.

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"The hardest ride I ever made was after a big mustang horse. He was a beautiful creature with long silken mane and tail. Jack and I captured several of them. This one got with an old outlaw horse that had on a big bell. We knew we would have to run him down to catch him, so we started toward the ranch. We ran them about fifteen miles and the clang of that big bell got louder and louder. I can hear it yet, when I think of that ride. We captured the old rascal about sundown. I didn't have a dry thread on me. I made this ride on my big Baby Dun horse.

"Stray horses bothered us so much by getting into the pasture that one day we roped a bunch of them and tied an old dry cowhide to each one of their tails. The last we saw of them, they were going over the hill with the cowhides standing straight out in the air. We had a good laugh and never saw the horses again.

"On one occasion we gathered eleven hundred cattle out of the Fort McKavett pasture to be moved to Tom Green County. We threw them together on the side of a rocky hill. Jack cut out all the strays and it fell to my lot to be placed between the cut and the herd, which is a very hard place. One old wild cow was thrown with the cut-backs. She tried to run over me and get back into the herd. I was riding a little grey pacing pony named Grand Pap. He was as quick as lightning. I ran that old heifer for thirty minutes. All at once she made a break, simply sniffing the air. I slapped my spurs into Grand Pap and wheeled around to head her off when my saddle turned under his belly and I fell to the ground among the rocks and mesquite bushes. My horse planted his foot on the skirt of my riding habit and stopped dead still. Bless his heart! Jack and the boys came running to me but I only had a few bruises and scratches. They fixed my saddle back on and I went on duty again. This time I took after that old cow and ran her so far she never came back. That ended the excitement until that night.

"At sun-down the cook struck camp and pitched my tent. (I always had my individual tent) then he prepared supper, which consisted of chili beans, flavored with garlic, fried calf meat, or broiled calf ribs, biscuit bread, baked in a big iron skillet (now called a dutch oven)

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black coffee, stewed dried apples, and molasses. Sometimes we had a dish called "Sun-of-a-Gun". All the cowboys considered that a treat and I must say it was good. When a meal was ready, the cook would holler, 7 'Come and get it, or I am going to throw it out'. A part of the boys held the herd while the others came in and ate, then they went back on duty and the other boys came in and ate.

"After supper Jack and I went on first guard. We were riding around and around, singing to keep the cattle quiet, when all of a sudden a big black cloud came up and in a few minutes the lightning was playing around on the cows' horns. The thunder was terrific, big drops of rain began to fall. I was riding a white horse but it was so dark I could see him only when the lightning flashed. The cattle were milling and stirring. All the boys were called out and we were doing pretty well holding them but the storm was growing worse and worse and the cattle getting more and more restless. There had been some wire fences built near where we camped and none of us knew how they ran, so as the cattle began to break away, the boss hollered 'Let 'em go'. We all went to the wagon, got in and sat there the rest of the night. We ate breakfast before daylight next morning and overtook the lead cattle about seven miles from camp. We only missed about fifty head and we got them back in the spring round-up.

"Jack's father owned three of the largest ranches in West Texas and Jack bossed them all. I have worked for months at a time with my husband, rounding up and branding cattle. I went on the drive and helped to throw the cattle on the round-up grounds. When all the drives were in we held the herd while the boss rode in and cut out all stray 8 cattle. The cut is hard to hold. The cattle cut out try to get back into the herd and as we keep them out they get very unruly and it takes a lot of riding to hold them.

"I had seven dandy saddle horses in my mount and they were all No. 1 cow horses. Jack was a natural cowboy and became the champion roper of the world, still holding this title. He roped six and seven years old steers weighing eight and nine hundred pounds, not

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calves like the champions of today rope. I would not waste my time looking at a calf or goat roping now.

“Jack and I rode the range together, in all kinds of weather. When we had a tenderfoot with the outfit the boys played jokes on him all the time. Some of them were pretty rough too. If he made a mistake which he did in most everything he tried to do, not knowing anything about the cow business, the boys would bend him over the wagon tongue and hit him six or eight licks with a pair of leather leggings. They called that putting the leggings on him. If there was a creek near by they would throw him in, cloths and all and tell him to swim or drown.

“Rattlesnakes are the worst enemies the cowboys have. They seem to want to share the boys' warm beds and often crawled in among their blankets.

“One night two of the boys made their beds together. One of the boys could make a hissing sound exactly like a rattlesnake. After they went to bed and got warm, Frank began to hiss through his teeth. The other old boy came out of that bed like a wild cat and could not be persuaded to go back to bed that night, what sleep he got was leaning against a tree by the fire with a big stick in his hand.

“On another occasion we moved a herd to the Colorado Ranch on the Colorado River. We had been branding and I was keeping tally. After we had finished we were so tired and dirty Jack said, 'Let's go to the river and take a bath'. He saddled old Dun, I mounted and he rode behind me. When we got to the river we saw that it was rising. The water looked dirty and red. I did not go in but Jack took his bath and we started back to camp. Old Dun was single footing and Jack slapped him on the hips, he got faster and pretty soon down he went and I went on over his head about five feet and landed right on my head. Jack, old Dun and I were all piled up together. My horse scrambled to his feet and Jack jumped up and picked me up. I was only stunned and came out of it in a minute with no bad effects except a big knot on my head. Jack was not hurt but my darling horse was standing there

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shaking all over and covered with dirt. His mouth was bleeding as the bit had broken and cut it. The sight of him in that condition hurt me worse than the fall I got. Baby Dun had stepped into an old out bed and that caused him to fall. Ordinarily he was as light footed as an elk.

“When we got back to the ranch we were rested and someone suggested that we go hunting. We kept a pack of 10 hounds in the barn left so we saddled fresh mounts and turned the dogs out. They were frisky and eager to run, barking and yelping, ready to go. It was fun to run and keep up with them. When we came to a wire fence the boys would jump down and kick the staples out and stand on the wire until we all rode over. When the dogs would catch the coyotes they had great fun killing them.

“I certainly enjoyed ranch life and wish I could live it all over again, but time had brought such changes that ranching is not what it used to be. I want to say that the old fashioned cowboys were the finest fellows I ever knew, loyal and true in every respect and had the greatest respect for women. They would lay down their lives if necessary for a woman. They were congenial among them selves and would give their boss the best they had in them. I will always say, luck to the cowboys wherever they may be found and sing to myself, I'm a jolly cowgirl, I hunt cows all the time. I always catch the Son-of-a-Gun who steals a cow of mine. I can ride a bronco and ride him with all ease. I can rope a streak of lightning and ride it where I please”.